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ABSTRACT

This article briefly describes the current status of middle schools in Ohio and attempts to establish a rationale for the development of the middle school. The author's central thesis is that curricular considerations for a middle school are basically identical to those of most junior high schools, and that in order to significantly improve the program, it is imperative to change the approach toward development of the middle school curriculum. The author discusses several curricular requirements for developing a model middle school, including personal development, development of skills for continued learning, and integration of organized knowledge. (Author/JG)

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CURRICULUM CONSIDERATIONS
FOR DEVELOPING A MODEL MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Speech Presented to

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In my opinion the work of educators such as Bill Alexander, University of Florida; Ann Grooms, Consultant Cincinnati area; Donald Eichorn, Assistant Superintendent Michigan Public Schools; and others have established a rationale for justifying a distinct middle school curriculum. However, my speech today is designed to explore a rationale for curriculum considerations for a middle school, and this is indeed my proposal, that we are talking about a different concept than the traditional junior high and not merely a different "label." I think that the most significant justification for a middle school concept is the need to create a school for children from ages 10 to 14. Bill Alexander (1969) has described this very aptly as the tranescence age; i.e. not a high school or primary program but a separate philosophy designed specifically for children from ages 10 to 14.

It is appropriate to briefly update the current movement to solidify the position of the middle school. There are approximately eight states that have presently adopted State Standards for Middle Schools. It may be of interest to you that in the State of Ohio H.B. 541 has been introduced to certify schools and school personnel for middle school. A middle school has been defined by H.B. 541 as grades

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five through eight or two or more consecutive grades. Such organization would require specific certificates for teachers to be certified for middle school. The University of Cincinnati, Xavier University, and other Ohio universities are currently reviewing and revamping certification requirements to prepare for H.B. 541. The prospects are bright that by 1980 Ohio will have separate certification standards for middle schools.

Specifically, curriculum considerations for a middle school are the most crucial deliberations for creating a different concept and not simply a structural label. We have been reasonably successful in implementing structural changes such as team teaching, nongraded, continuous progress and individualization for middle school. However, curriculum changes occur much slower in relationship to structural changes. It is my position that unless one gives attention to curricular changes there will be no significant change for the children.

I would like for you to consider three areas that Bill Alexander (1969) has described as important in developing a curriculum for a middle school. I have prepared a transparency to explain these three areas. Curricular change must consider (1) Personal Development, (2) Skills for Continued Learning, (3) Organized Knowledge.

The personal development area includes learning activities that are related to help each child develop to his maximum level of self actualization. This area includes opportunities for counseling, the development of values, health and physical development, and the exploration of many interests. The counseling program must be designed to assist the in-between or pubescent to reach his maximum potential as an individual. Abraham Maslow (1970) with his theory of needs hierarchy and self actualization establishes worthy goals for the

counseling program. Carl Rogers (1961) in his book titled "Toward Becoming a Fully Functioning Person" offers some suggestions for human development in the affective domain of the curriculum.

The counseling program must allow for differences in physical development, mental development, social development and emotional development. Robert Havighurst's theory on developmental tasks is important to understanding and developing a counseling program and a recent study (1973) has shown that the developmental tasks of middle children cover three areas. (1) The first area considers the child's movement away from the home influence to that of the peer group (2) The second area explores the development of neuromuscular skills, and (3) the third and final area deals with the introduction to adult concepts. The good middle school counselor must have an in-depth understanding of human development. The counseling program must provide for individual and group counseling sessions. Group counseling projects might include such topics as personality development, family life, drug abuse, mental health, career education, etc. The range of interests of middle school students is varied and covers a large number of topics. Additionally, I would recommend that an effective counseling program include a home room counseling program that involves all teachers and provides for their being available to provide a close relationship with each individual student. The counseling program will be most effective if the counselor is a coordinator and facilitator in involving teachers in both individual and group counseling sessions. The goal for all members of the school community, i.e., students, parents, and teachers, is to move in the direction of self actualization.

The development of values and moral development has received increased attention in recent years because of the seemingly

increased examples of immoral conduct in society. Larry Kohlberg (1968) has developed a theory on moral development that is important to consider in planning a curriculum for personal development. Kohlberg's theory (1968) on moral development is similar to Piaget's (1952) theory on cognitive development. Kohlberg (1968) would recommend that the curriculum include experiences that would facilitate moral development. Middle school students will be at individually different levels of development in values and therefore curriculum activities are needed that will help them to develop a set of values that will help guide their behavior. Personal development could be enhanced by providing activities that would include simulation games of role playing, value clarifications, ethnic questions, environmental problems, learning to deal with conflicts, global activities and many others.

Another aspect of curriculum planning for personal development would include providing for individual interests by offering many exploratory opportunities. The middle school student needs to be exposed to many activities with the opportunity to develop a variety of skills. There must be a broad spectrum of courses in the practical arts and in the fine arts to enrich personal development. Typical curriculum offerings should include health, physical education, foreign language, arts and crafts, shop, home economics, typing, vocal music and instrumental music. These courses should be made available for 8 to 10 weeks with students rotating for exposure to at least four different experiences. Obviously, courses would be multi-level age and include both boys and girls.

Recent research indicates that the co-curricular part of a middle school has been largely music and athletic activities and there exists a seeming lack of variety in club activities. Co-curricular activities

should include band, orchestra, chorus, glee club, student government, student publications, intramural athletics, speech, debating, dramatics and a wide variety of club activities. Many middle schools have enriched their program by scheduling mini courses which allow for both student and teacher interest. The courses generally vary in length from two, three, or four weeks and include a variety of topics, such as cartography, African history, dance, chess, fossil collecting, creative stitchery, photography, and many others.

In planning the curriculum the health and physical education program must be planned to encourage the development of physical skills as well as for emotional development. The program must recognize that this period of rapid growth leads to poor motor skill control and a low tolerance for fatigue. There is a preoccupation with the development of the body because of the rapid change and health habits are very important to boys and girls from ages 10 to 14. Additionally, the physical maturity of most boys and girls reach culmination at an earlier age than was previously true. The curriculum planner must provide activities that enhance self concept and the importance of physical development of middle school students should be recognized.

The second area of curriculum for a middle school could be called "skills for continued learning." These skills are sometimes referred to as life long or process oriented or "learning how to learn." This period should either continue or initiate a desire to continue learning and to develop skills that will prepare the student for adolescence and adulthood. In acquiring skills for continued learning, curriculum planners are interested in not only an attitudinal change but also the cognitive skills are emphasized to develop the potential to continue to learn. This area of curriculum interest would include the affective,

cognitive, and psychomotor learning domains. Intellectual and social skills must be acquired during the middle school years. Skills for continued learning could be divided into three areas: (1) Communication skills, both oral and written. This would include the ability to read with understanding, listening skills, library tools, note taking, problem solving and the ability to use maps, charts, globes, etc. Students must be able to behaviorally demonstrate communication skills. (2) As described in a recent study (Bloom 1958) students need to be able to develop analytical skills. Students must acquire skills for applying data, gathering information, deduction and induction, as well as skills for excluding information. (3) The third area relating to skills for continued learning is that of independent study. The student needs to have an opportunity to pursue interest topics at his own rate and pace with the teacher serving primarily as a resource person. The teacher should play the role of a motivator and facilitator by encouraging students to find solutions to difficult tasks. In planning curriculum we must plan to allow students time for independent activities.

The third area that is important for developing a middle school curriculum is that of Organized Knowledge. A good middle school program must provide subject matter to be systematically organized in fields such as English, math, social studies, and science. I would add to these a fifth discipline of reading. The curriculum must be organized to consider Piaget (1952) theories of learning in concrete operations and formal operations. It is my position that knowledge must be sequential and follow a developmental pattern. It is an accumulation of learning experiences that will bring about understanding. Organized knowledge must be planned to consider vertical as well as horizontal designs. Team planning is necessary to facilitate articulation of curriculum. If one accepts the theory of sequential development for

learning it must be recognized that the curriculum should be organized to encourage individualization. In organizing the traditional disciplines, special consideration should be given to integrating subject matter. Aristotle said it best when he described the "sum as being no more than its parts." Obviously, there are common isomorphic subcomponents of each discipline that can be organized and taught as a whole theory for the purpose of improving conceptual understanding. In this time of "back to basics" we must give special consideration to improving the method of organizing knowledge.

In conclusion, I would like to stimulate and challenge secondary principals across the United States to look at the real issues confronting middle schools. Time does not permit me to deal with all of the important issues; but suffice it to say that there is a real need for research in the area of middle school development to resolve problems such as the best grouping method for students, what grade levels to include, how to report student progress, what should be the relationship of middle schools with the university, what part athletics should play in middle schools, and the final issue of how committed are we as educators to bring about curriculum changes in our middle schools. If middle schools are to make any impact the curriculum changes that I have described to you must occur.

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